

*Symphony No. 2* by Richard Wilson

Evelyn Waugh began one of his novels with a chapter entitled, "Portrait of the Artist in Middle Age." My Symphony No. 2 could be thought of as "Portrait of the Composer Straining to Appear Still Young." Despite the writer's cramp, eyestrain, a sore back, loss of memory, and hair that is falling out, I attempt to project a balletic liteness, a rush of energy, a headstrong recklessness. It will be noticed that none of the symphony's three movements is a "slow movement": no contemplation of mortality or bucolic serenity here. Admittedly, traces of the traditional adagio may be found articulating the first movement and framing the second. But these passages tend to be overshadowed by extended areas of rapid activity. Restlessness and anxiety abound. As in the Waugh novel, insomnia may be a latent theme.

The causes of all this agitation are perhaps not for me to identify. About the musical materials themselves I can say that the augmented triad--the least stable of the four types of triads--seems fundamental to the harmony. The rhythm, on the other hand, seems more stable, regular and motoric than in some of my music. As to the style in general, the work is not minimalist, neo-tonal, neo-romantic, nor is it neo-eclectic. It may be neo-neo-classical--I am not sure what that is, but the term is appealing.

Symphony No. 2 was composed during 1986 and is dedicated to Leon Botstein, who conducted its first performance with the Hudson Valley Philharmonic Chamber Orchestra in January, 1987, at Bard College.

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